

**KNOPMANMARKS**  
FINANCIAL TRAINING

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

# Learning to Blend

A personalized, interactive approach to remote learning, dubbed “The Blend” by Knopman Marks Financial Training, helped students achieve the best test results in the firm’s history.

**T**hough COVID-19 forced a move to online learning that proved challenging and frustrating for millions of students and teachers worldwide, one group of educators seems to have it figured out. Knopman Marks Financial Training has emerged with overwhelmingly positive reviews and record-breaking pass rates for its students after a pivot from a longstanding in-person training model.

When schools closed in March, teachers scrambled to master online technology and devise approaches to engage and educate students of all ages. In May, Knopman Marks, a leading provider of securities licensing prep, rolled out a new remote learning model, The Blend, that combines pre-recorded lectures with live-streamed, interactive coaching sessions. Now the results are in: The Blend has helped more than 4,000 students in the graduate summer training class achieve a 99% pass rate across more than 10,000 qualification exams for the financial services industry—the highest pass rate in Knopman Marks’ 29-year history.

“We exceeded all expectations,” says Brian Marks, president of Knopman Marks. “The Blend kept students engaged, gave them even more time with faculty to resolve pain points, and delivered our best pass rate ever.”

Though some remain skeptical of the value proposition of virtual learning, thought leaders have been experimenting with remote learning, and blended variations, for years. A leading proponent of blended learning is Anant Agarwal, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He’s also the CEO of edX, an online learning destination founded by Harvard University and MIT. The focus of edX is to transform learning—both online and in-person—through groundbreaking approaches and cutting-edge research. Agarwal believes the blended model offers many promising applications, depending on what you choose to emphasize and how you choose to brew it. “One of the beauties of the blended model is that it can be infinitely personalized,” says Agarwal. “You can blend espresso, or you can blend coffee water.”

***Knopman Marks students averaged a record-breaking 99% pass rate.***

## Early Reluctance

**A promising experiment, born out of necessity, was initially greeted with caution by Knopman Marks clients.** No firm wanted to be the first to diverge from how training had looked for the past 20 years. Ultimately, “the pandemic forced all firms to try something different simultaneously, re-inventing training in the process,” Marks says.

Many students were skeptical about a move online too. But without an in-person alternative, Students like Philip Abularrage, who had to pass a securities licensing exam for his job, reluctantly gave remote learning a try. “I thought remote learning would make it difficult to stay motivated to study,” says Abularrage, an investment banking analyst who participated in the Series 79 Exam training with Knopman Marks this summer. “I found The Blend a lot better than I thought it would be.”

*“The Blend provided a learning environment tailored to my personal strengths and what I needed to improve upon. It would have been much harder to do this in a traditional in-person setting.”*

—Philip Abularrage, student, Knopman Marks

## The Blend

**Blended learning includes different instructional methods (lectures, discussion, guided practice, reading, gamification),** different delivery methods (live classroom or live-streaming), different scheduling (synchronous or asynchronous), and different levels of guidance (individual, instructor led, or group learning). Also known as the flipped classroom, a typical blended approach “flips” traditional ways of teaching.

We’re used to an instructor lecturing a group of students in class and assigning homework that students complete on their own, to drill concepts. In a flipped classroom, students listen to the instructor’s lectures on their own, and then connect with the instructor in group reviews with other students, or one-on-one, to drill concepts.

Knopman Marks’ blended brew replaces 8-hour lecture days. Instead, students interact

with faculty three times a day—morning, midday, and end of day—and watch recorded lecture modules in between. As students review the lectures, they have the security of knowing that they have a scheduled faculty check-in around the corner where they can ask any questions that arise. The pre-recorded lectures also allow candidates to self-pace, spending more time where they need it and less time where they don’t.

In addition to tuning in for scheduled review sessions with faculty and classmates, students who need more help can have one-on-one coaching calls with faculty.

“I loved being able to run with the videos and prep at my own speed,” said Stephen Saville, who participated in the Series 79 training with Knopman Marks.

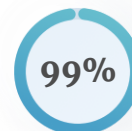
### Most students surveyed about their blended learning training with Knopman Marks viewed the experience positively:



*prefer the blended model to an all-day, live-streaming virtual class.*



*felt that they were able to study in a more targeted manner.*



*reported Knopman Marks faculty as accessible to answer questions either “usually” or “always.”*

## What's Synchronous Learning?

**A headline in Education Week warns that instruction during COVID-19 offers less learning time, thereby driving “fears of academic erosion.”** The article goes on to note that “pandemic learning is complex and contradictory.” Indeed, the experiences and options for learning remotely vary broadly. Dave Meshkov, head of course design at Knopman Marks, believes that one of the reasons The Blend performed so well, while other remote learning approaches are still finding their footing, is the combination of synchronous learning (in real-time, usually together) and asynchronous learning (anytime and usually independent), along with the availability of faculty for one-on-one powwows.

“It turns out that real-time interactions with students are more significant in terms of their exam performance outcomes than being in the same location,” says Meshkov.

Synchronous learning, or learning that happens at the same time for the instructor and learners, is when a lot of the magic happens. “The most valuable time I spent with students wasn’t during classroom lecture. It was when we zeroed in on the specific topics that they found challenging or confusing, and I could offer additional explanation and opportunities for application of the ideas,” adds Meshkov, who led the design of the blended approach at Knopman Marks.

*“It turns out that real-time interactions with students are more significant in terms of their exam performance outcomes than being in the same location.”*—Dave Meshkov, head of course design, Knopman Marks

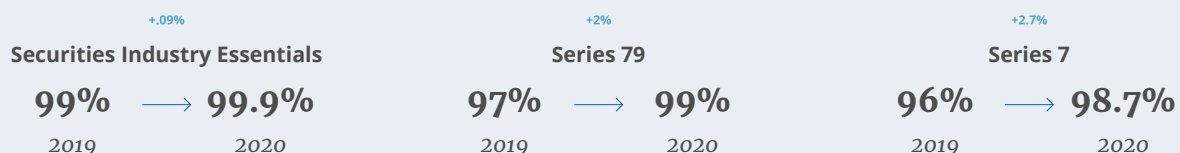
## Record Pass Rates

**Scoring an impressive 99% pass rate, the Wall Street analyst and associate summer training class of 2020 broke all prior records.**

The 99% pass rate this year compares with a 95.52% pass rate for 2019. The Blend also contributed to a 74% decline in the number of exam failures on the major exams (SIE, Series 79, Series 7). By reducing the failure rate, an estimated 15,000 study hours were saved. Meshkov notes that these are hours that candidates now have back to spend “on the desk” at work, producing for their firm.

“We know that it’s very important to our students to be able to start their career on the right foot, with all their exams passed on the first try and total focus on learning about their new job,” says Meshkov. “Passing the first time means they won’t have to have that uncomfortable ‘I didn’t pass’ conversation with their manager, or juggle prepping for their exam again during their first month of work.”

**Students had higher pass rates across the major exams this summer, compared with last summer.**



## Why did pass rates edge upward this summer?

Meshkov attributes the higher pass rates to aspects of the firm’s blended approach that he believes improve the educational experience for students and make it easier for faculty to identify students who may need intervention before it’s too late.

### Key highlights of The Blend include:



#### Coaching students to master the material.

Live-streaming sessions are devoted to reviewing testable content. Students can ask questions and are guided to apply what they have learned. “The result is greater student engagement, retention, and mastery of the material,” says Meshkov. This interactive group time allows faculty to coach students and make sure they can recall and apply the material learned from the video lectures.



#### Weaving in high-performance coaching.

Knopman Marks faculty share high-performance focus and motivation tips with students, teach them how to approach training with a growth mindset, and present strategies and tactics to overcome test-taking anxiety.



#### Making learning more efficient.

The blended training model allows for self-pacing, which lets candidates spend more time where they need it and less time where they don’t.



#### One-on-one check-ins.

The Blend gave faculty time during the video training sessions to review student performance data and conduct individual coaching sessions. Focusing on students with test-taking anxiety, those with liberal arts educations or no internships in financial services, or those who simply needed coaching and advice allowed faculty to help those students who needed it most.



#### Keeping students engaged virtually.

Students can ask questions by raising their hand virtually. They can also type their questions into the built-in Q&A feature and participate in the instructor’s real-time polls. The live-polling function allows faculty to see what may be confusing to students, or where they’re misunderstanding information, so they can speak directly to those topics. The live-polling function also helps improve student engagement with icebreakers, problem solving, games like Jeopardy, and other entertaining learning activities.

## A Broader Perspective

**Blended learning can equip teachers to create the ideal learning experience for 21st-century students**, according to Agarwal, the MIT professor and founder of edX. In a TED talk, Agarwal discussed early results of an experiment with a blended classroom. “The instructors flipped the classroom, and the results were staggering,” he said.

He noted that after a blended approach was introduced, a class that for years had a failure rate of about 40% each semester saw the failure rate drop to 9%. “The results can be extremely, extremely good,” Agarwal said, attributing the success to three key aspects of the blended approach: active learning, self-pacing, and instant feedback.

Alfonso Gonzalez, a teacher for 29 years, believes that exposure to blended learning will benefit students throughout their lives.

“Even before COVID, [students] were very likely to learn, get higher education degrees, or do on-the-job training through blended learning,” Gonzales says. “So the sooner [students] are exposed to those modes of learning, the better prepared they will be for their future learning.”

Enrique Dans writes in Forbes that blended learning will be the benchmark going forward. “Educational activity will no longer be face-to-face or online but a blend,” he writes. Dans, who teaches innovation at IE Business School, views the ability to adapt to changing modes of learning as a critical skill for students and teachers alike.

“In today’s world, we are all required to continually learn and unlearn,” he notes. “Institutions, academic directors, teachers or students who are unable to adapt will simply have no place in this new scenario.”

**Though blended training is still in the experimental phase for many during the COVID-19 era, prior applications of the blended model showed promising results, including:**



### More engagement

*73% of educators observed an increase in student engagement.*



### Better retention

*Blended learning saw up to a 60% increase in information retention.*



### Higher motivation

*59% of teachers reported students’ motivation levels increased.*

*“The massive confidence boost our students saw reflects our high-performance coaching.”*—**Brian Marks**, president, Knopman Marks

## The Future of Learning

**Some say the future of learning is virtual. Certainly, the way we teach is evolving.**

Educators note that designing learning experiences that mirror the way younger learners use technology on a daily basis—on demand, in bite-size pieces, wherever they are, and at their convenience—significantly increases the effectiveness of that learning.

The blended model reflects how we use technology, as well as larger trends that characterize the future of learning, such as the shift from the teacher as “a sage on a stage” who lectures a passive group of students, to the teacher as coach, partner, and mentor. The Blend also encourages students to adapt a growth mindset, which helps us view challenge and change as motivation to increase effort and learning, rather than as reasons to be discouraged.

In addition to higher pass rates, Knopman Marks students who experienced The Blend saw a dramatic rise in confidence.

Tracking student confidence levels at the start and end of training revealed an 83% increase in confidence. “The massive confidence boost our students saw reflects our high-performance coaching, along with the effectiveness of our interactive, live-streaming sessions and the one-on-ones that students can schedule to talk through any concerns they may have,” notes Marks.

Students are quick to note that the way classes are taught makes a difference. “You have a great teaching style that instills comfort and confidence,” said Hoit, who passed the Series 79 exam this summer, of the Knopman Marks faculty.

For students who trained with Knopman Marks, The Blend of remote learning that the firm brewed turned out to be more than a quick fix in times of COVID-19. “Even when things return to normal,” notes Saville, the student who passed the Series 79 exam this summer, “I think the blended model that Knopman Marks uses will be a great way of teaching.”

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